



**Testimony of Sarah Matney, MSOL, BSN, RN, CPON, CENP
Senior Vice President, Clinical Services & Chief Nursing Officer and
Howard Sovronsky, LCSW, Chief Behavioral Health Officer
At Connecticut Children's
to the Appropriations Committee
Regarding HB 6901- *An Act Concerning A Student Loan Reimbursement Program for
Certain Professionals***

March 24, 2023

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the legislature's Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony regarding House Bill 6901- *An Act Concerning a Student Loan Reimbursement Program for Certain Professionals*.

Our names are Sarah Matney and Howard Sovronsky and, respectively, we serve as the Senior Vice President of Clinical Services and Chief Nursing Officer, and the Chief Behavioral Health Officer at Connecticut Children's Medical Center. Connecticut Children's is a nationally recognized, 187-bed not-for-profit children's hospital driving innovation in pediatrics. With nearly 3,000 employees and over 1,300 on our medical staff, we are the only hospital in the state dedicated exclusively to the care of children.

HB 6901 proposes to establish a pilot program for student loan reimbursement for those employed full-time as a nurse, teacher, or in the field of child care, mental health, or social services. We are submitting testimony in support of this proposal because of its potential to support and strengthen Connecticut's healthcare workforce.

At Connecticut Children's, you will often hear our team members say that, "kids are not little adults." Their growing bodies and developing minds come with a unique set of healthcare needs. As a result, a robust pediatric workforce is essential to ensuring that all children have access to experts who are specifically trained to care for them. A key component to ensuring the viability of this workforce is training. As one of the 1% of hospitals nationwide that trains pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists, Connecticut Children's is committed to teaching, developing, and empowering new clinical leaders. We are proud to serve as the primary pediatric teaching hospital for the UConn School of Medicine and also have a teaching partnership with the Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine at Quinnipiac University.

As is the case for other hospitals and healthcare providers across the state, we are facing significant workforce shortages and struggle to find qualified staff for many positions in our health system—from medical assistants to child psychologists to nurses. As the state considers new strategies for cultivating and recruiting healthcare professionals we would like to remind policymakers that pediatrics has unique needs, challenges, and skillsets required of our professionals. As such, I and my colleagues at Connecticut Children's are ready and willing to share our insights and expertise with policymakers and serve as partners throughout this process.

When it comes to the children's behavioral health crisis, a significant driver of challenges related to accessing pediatric behavioral healthcare is the behavioral health workforce shortage. State

leaders and providers can work hard to create innovative new programs to support kids and families, but there has to be sufficient clinicians to staff these services.

Although the response to the healthcare workforce shortage must be cross-sector, multi-faceted, and offer short, mid, and long-term solutions, establishing a student loan reimbursement program is one piece of the puzzle which may help incentivize the next generation of nurses and behavioral health professionals.

Thank you for your consideration of this position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Emily Boushee (eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org), Government Relations Manager for Connecticut Children's with any questions.